WHAT GIRL SCOUTING SHOULD MEAN TO BLIND GIRLS.

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WHAT GIRL SCOUTING SHOULD MEAN TO BLIND GIRLS

What should Girl Scouting mean to blind girls? Assuredly, it should mean to blind girls all that it does to girls who have sight -- opportunities for active outdoor ~~life~~, for entrance into the fascinating life of Nature, for the acquisition of many skills and techniques, for wholesome companionship with others of their own age. There are two contributions, however, which have meaning for all girls but which have a special significance for girls without sight. The first is the opportunity to be of service to others, and the second is the opportunity of learning how to be accepted as equals by seeing members of their own social groups.

During recent years much has been said about the right of physically handicapped people to a full, rich, happy life. That they have this right cannot very well be denied, but it seems as though the time had come to call attention to the fact that no one can have a truly rich, constructive, mature life who has not learned to bear his share of responsibility as a citizen and as a member of a social group.

Under normal circumstances, the acquisition of rights brings with it an unavoidable assumption of duties and responsibilities. To relieve a person of his obligations while allowing him to exercise his rights, can only react against him, socially. This is especially true of the physically handicapped girl who, if she is to expect physically normal young people to adapt their activities to her physical disabilities, must be ready to be more thoughtful of others than is the average seeing girl, more ready to do her share of the work, more ready to make allowance for other people's weaknesses. Where better than within the Girl Scout organization can the blind girl

learn to exercise her rights wisely and to perform her duties cheerfully? Through its insistence that each girl live up to the Girl Scout Promise and the Laws, this movement can bring to girls without sight actual experience in being of service to others, although to find such opportunities will call for ingenuity, patience, and forethought on the part of the leaders. Because of their handicap blind girls are always having to have things done for them. If they go shopping, someone must take them; if they go to a party, they must be dependent on someone else's thoughtfulness for their evening's fun; they must even ask to have their personal mail read to them. Constantly, they must call upon others to do services <u>for</u> them; rarely are they in a position to be of service <u>to</u> others. Consequently, when the chance does come for them to help other people, they sometimes surprise their friends by failing to appreciate the existence of the opportunity, or by resenting its presence if they do recognize it.

Not only can Girl Scouting bring to these girls a feeling of satisfaction in being of service to others, but it can teach them to discriminate wisely as to the types of favors they should feel free to expect <u>from</u> those who see. For instance, in their anxiety to be entirely independent some blind girls refuse to let seeing friends help them at the dinner table even when they are eating in public -- a misguided independence which often results in embarrassment for everyone. Each blind girl should be trained to wait upon herself at table quite independently, for at home she will not need to call upon the family for assistance, and even in public she must sometimes rely upon herself. However, since in the average restaurant one can never be sure just how tender a piece of meat is going to be until it

has been tested, and since the butter may be near the middle of the butter plate or may be toward the dinner plate instead of away from it, and since small plates may be heaped high with food, the only sure way for the blind person to be inconspicuous is to have his food prepared for him. Just when to be independent and when to accept help requires a degree of judgment which can come only through practice and guidance. Such guidance can be given by a sympathetic leader.

The first major contribution, then, which Girl Scouting can offer to blind girls is that of giving them the opportunity to serve as well as to be served. The second is that of making possible happy social adjustments for the Girl Scout who does not see. In a sense, of course, this second contribution includes the first. With visually handicapped girls, social poise, and happiness in social life, are rare. The right type of leader, especially if she lives outside of the institution, can do much toward guiding the blind girl into making normal social contacts. In this way, the leader will accomplish ~~much~~ a great deal toward making life more worthwhile for the girl without sight.

Probably the ideal method of providing for blind girls within the Girl Scout organization is that of admitting one or two to a troop otherwise composed of seeing girls. Nevertheless, since this is not often possible there must always be troops composed entirely of blind girls, especially in residential schools for the blind. For each such troop it is highly desirable to have a sister troop of seeing girls who will work and play on equal terms with those who are blind. Through such companionship the social "gawkiness" which is so often apparent in the blind should be overcome or forestalled in visually handicapped Girl Scouts. Thus, under the social stimulus

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of those whose approval she seeks, the blind Scout can be taught those many indefinite but socially important observances which are called for by good taste, yet about which many a blind girl may be ignorant or indifferent unless they can be made to seem of value to her. Apparently the social effectiveness of good manners lies more in their visual appeal than we realize. They often seem like stupid nonsense to blind people; yet the blind girl who is to be at home in normal social life simply must learn to conform to the social requirements of the seeing. When one has had occasion to see what minor things can stand between a blind girl and her achievement of normal friendships one becomes impressed by the importance of the little things in life. For instance, blind girls often hold teacups awkwardly and most insecurely, yet for the safety of those around them at an afternoon tea, they must be persistent in trying to learn how to manage gracefully not only a teacup, but a saucer, a spoon, a napkin and sometimes a plate.

A blind Girl Scout must also learn to turn toward the person who is speaking to her; she must learn to carry herself well, holding her head high and her body in good alignment; she must be able to put other girls at ease; she must even learn to be gracious when her toes are stepped upon. Furthermore, she must learn that when <u>she</u> steps on someone else's toes, or spills tea on someone else's dress, she must be as genuinely contrite as would a seeing girl, but she must <u>not</u> be so supersensitive in her reaction as to make everyone uncomfortable.

Through meeting her Second and First Class requirements, and through her work for Proficiency Badges, the blind Girl Scout can acquire

the many little graces which are so trivial individually yet which are so important in their effect on her social adjustment. This she can do if she works under a wise leader and in cooperation with understanding Girl Scouts who work and play with her in an atmosphere of friendliness and fun. Especially in connection with the Home Makers Badge she should acquire invaluable poise through knowing that she can do just what seeing girls do, and can become as delightful a hostess as any of them.

To one who is blind, Girl Scouting should mean, more than anything else, an entrance into the happy land of normal social life with seeing people, where she is unquestioningly granted all of the rights accorded to the unhandicapped, and where she bears her share of duties and responsibilities. Opportunities for service to others and happy personal adjustment with the seeing -- these two are the great contributions which Girl Scouting can bring to the blind girl.

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